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Jhumur: A Narrative Tradition of Krishna Katha of Purulia District and Beyond

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Abstract

Jhumur is a traditional rural song of Purulia district in West Bengal. It is a living legacy of performing tradition. It has a long history, and its origin can be traced to the paintings of the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra. The Jhumur song was performed by people from the lower strata of society, namely the Santal, Mahato, Kalindi, etc. Primarily, it is considered the song of 'adirasa.' After the birth of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534), the nature of the song, dance, and subject matter changed immensely. Interestingly, during the period of the Mughal Empire (1526-1761), this form underwent significant changes. The characters are taken from our mythological stories, specifically Radha and Krishna. The love story and the theme of the dance can be linked to the Bhakti movement in India. On the one hand, it also has a religious dimension. On the other, it brings to the fore the socio-economic conditions of the particular community. Their life and cultural productions are not free from political domination. Can we accept their cultural productions in our mainstream literary history? Or what is the politics behind their being "unrecognised" or "undervalued" in our society? Whether this performing art should be considered as marginal or it is connected to the mainstream literary tradition. This article will seek to address these issues and questions.

Keywords: *Community, Margin, Tradition, Mainstream, Culture, Theme.*

Introduction

Jhumur is a fertility song sung by a group of people, accompanied by a motion of dance. The subject matter of the song is infused with emotional elements. In the performance, we can see a unique expression from the artists. It is said that geopolitical boundaries have played a significant role in the lives of Jhumur performers. There are several reasons to illustrate the points and lifestyle of these performers' performances. The performers inhabit tribal regions and live in close proximity to nature. That's why their way of life and expression determine the mood of the performance (Dipankar Ghosh 30). Naturally, their songs are spontaneous and very natural in expression The relationship with natural phenomena is obvious in their performances and songs. Most importantly, the cyclic nature of life has been captured in the expression of the performance and the language of the songs. It is notable that whatever is related to nature is inseparably associated with their lifestyle; subsequently, there is a natural affinity present in Jhumur performance (Milankanti Biswas 29). As K. Ayyappa Paniker articulates that while Indian literature is one, writers and readers in one language know very little of what is being written in a neighbouring language of the same country"(Paniker11). Here the Jhumur performance is regarded as a literary text and needs to be interpreted. Most of the words of Jhumur songs exhibit rural love stories and situations of daily life problems. This

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performance has the privilege to alter the original theme or words of the Radha Krishna katha. So, Krishna from the *Bhagavata Purana* is transferred into the character Rakhal Krishna. Similarly, the same is true in depicting the character of Radha.

At the same time, it reflects the life struggles of people closely associated with the land and their narratives. When we write about the trajectory of the Jhumur performance tradition, we should keep in mind that it has two separate sides of analysis. One side includes the elements, natural aspects, and aesthetic appeal of the form, as well as the origin and development of this form and its impact on the lives of artists and the people of the Bankura and Purulia district. This type of analysis is relatively straightforward, and the execution is more or less linear. The other way of explanation is more complex, tracing the journey of Jhumur as it exchanges literary elements with other literary art forms. Its themes and subject matter vary from time to time and obviously, from place to place. It is considered that Jhumur is not mainstream performance tradition. Rather, it is very important genre of oral literature. In her book *Puruliar Lokosanskriti*, Mita Ghosh Bakshi depicts the issues that Jhumur is rooted in the lives of people; its sound reverberates in every breath of the Santhal and Munda community. According to her, Jhumur signifies a powerful rural medium. It plays a significant role in society and culture and is also an expression of love and hopelessness. Jhumur is an integral part of the community of Purulia. It serves as a medium of art and protest. Maniklal Singh, in his book *Paschim Radh Tatha Bankura Sanskriti*, describes the area of Rarh Bangla, which includes Dakshin Rarh and North Rarh. Dalbhum, Singhbhum, Shabarbhum, Barahbhum, Shikharbhum, and Tungabhum are part of the Chotanagpur plateau in Santhal Parganas.

At this point I would like to focus the concept Jhumur is associated with the soil of Bankura and Purulia. The vast area of Chotanagpur reverberates with the melody of Jhumur music. This tune is echoed with the landscape and the jungle. It is also an integral part of indigenous culture. Jhumur songs were once associated with the Chhau dance. This style of Jhumur is referred to as *rang Jhumur*. Additionally, *nachni Jhumur* is still popular in this area with the *nachni* dance. Here is another aspect of the *leaf dance Jhumur* (Ghosh 30). It is interesting to note that during the British period, the people of this area migrated to Darjeeling and Assam, where they worked as labourers on tea estates, forcefully recruited by the government. Therefore, the cultural exchange and reception of rural musical elements might be possible between two geopolitical areas: Chotanagpur and North East. So their lifestyle, history, struggle, repression, rituals, protests, conflicts, and daily life consequences became part of their songs, literature, and oral history. Considering this, a larger way of expression and a way of life came into being in literary history. Elsewhere, without ignoring all these aspects of community life and their way of life, we should recognize their contributions to writing literary history. Purulia Jhumur performance blends mythological devotion with local cultural aesthetics. The Jhumur tradition is deeply intertwined with Chhau dance and the Pata Chitra tradition.

Subject matter and theme of Jhumur performance

There is no way to argue that the subject matter and tone of Jhumur will be the same from the Jhumur of Purulia to the Jhumur of the northern states of West Bengal. This is obvious because their natural views, seasonal changes, and socio-political contexts are different. Therefore, the acceptance of Jhumur songs and expressions differs among the hill tribes of Darjeeling, Assam, and Jalpaiguri in comparison to the Chotanagpur tribes like Bankura and Purulia. In my discussion Jhumur song and Jhumur performance are not separate categories, but complement each other. Now we move on to the discussion of the nature, theme, and subject matter of Jhumur performance. In his book titled *Lokayater Atmakatha*, Dipankar Ghosh introduces a renowned Jhumur artist from the Purulia district, namely Salabat Mahato. According to him, there is no transcript of this Jhumur. However, there is, of course, a raga. The songs are not associated with any specific raga, so anyone can sing Jhumur because there is no transcript of this song (Ghosh 32).

Theme of Jhumur song have a close connection with Lord Krishna. Most of the Jhumur singers were influenced by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a fifteen century Indian saint who is considered to be the combined avatar of Radha and Krishna (Susmita Shome 423).They mainly sang about the Divine love story between Radha and Krishna. The most notable singers of this time were Tulsidas(1511-1623), Surdas(1483-1583), Jaydev(1170-1245), Bidyapati (1352-1448). A Jhumur song expresses the immortal love story of Radha Krishna (Ausotosh Bhattacharya 96). Such as: *jayad talatebajailo bansi/ sunte pachi/bajai o na pramer bansi go, /ami sunane jachi* (Nandadula Aacharya129) *kiya ful moho moho/ jaba ful lal re/sarojun fule dada /jharlo jal* (Acharrya 129). Here, flower symbolizes the beautiful young woman. Another example of a Jhumur song: *Dal bhang, ful tul, bandhu, madhu khayo na/pirite korete tumi maram jano na/kene mana suno na/kene baron suno na/ pirite korete tumi maram jano na* (Acharya 131). Jhumur song is created orally. Love, celebration, separation, union, leisure, dreams, and sex—all the poles of life become embodied in Laukik Jhumur songs.

Riddhi Bhattacharyya, in his article "Jhumur Dance: A Cultural Heritage of West Bengal," addresses that Jhumur acts as the "window into the soul of Bengal's tribal heritage." He also argues that Jhumur is originally the product of social and spiritual expression of tribal life and is danced at religious and community functions. Jhumur represents the past and retains the cultural heritage of West Bengal. The history of artist and their community migration also could be better found if we go through the subject matter of the song. There are multiple layers of meaning. So, it is very clear that it is not only the song of *adirasa* or entertainment rather Jhumur is the song that expresses the community's history. On the one hand it has captured the aesthetic quality and pleasant elements for mild acceptance for the readers or audience. At the same time, it is a record of the history of struggle and existence, particularly for a few communities.

Various types of Jhumur

In the book *Sangit Damodara* written by Subhankara it is said that Jhumur songs will have an abundance of *adirasa*. However, not all Jhumur songs contain *adirasa*. Jhumur is an exceptional form of folk music, where the names of most Jhumur composers can be found. The *Madal* is the main musical instrument used in Jhumur songs. Apart from the *Madal*, other instruments like the harmonium, flute, *dhol*, and *dhammsa* are also used. Jhumur is divided into several categories, namely *Dhar Jhumur*, *Tarr Jhumur*, *Nachni Nacher Jhumur*, *Kati Nacher Jhumur*, and *Bhaduria Jhumur*. Jhumur songs have also been composed on topics such as Radha-Krishna love, secular love, mythology, and society. The subject matter of Jhumur songs is gradually changing day by day (Milankanti Biswas 29).

The tribal people of the area express their love for nature as well as for their beloved in a highly emotional way. The rainy season is heralded by the blossoming of the *karam* tree. This period is also marked by the drying up of the leaves of the *Arjun* tree, which takes place in the month of July. The next and very important festival during the rainy season is the *karam* festival. In this festival, a branch of the karam tree is placed in the ground. After that, there is all-night dancing and singing around it. Every day at dusk, the yellow flowers of the vegetable creeper bloom in abundance. Here, a young damsel is compared to the green *kadamba* fruit. Their emotions are the opposite if there is no rain. In the following Santali song, their heart-rending sorrow, lamentation, and heavy sighs for drought have been vividly expressed in emotional Jhumar songs. In tune, rhythm, and melody, that remote early tradition is still followed. By using simple metaphors, they identify their lovers with the common and lovely things of Nature, such as *Jhingey phul*, *Pia fruit*, and *Mahua* buds, as well as *Sal* flowers.

To begin a discussion of the pujas and *bratas* of the tribal peoples of Chotanagpur, let me first address the issue of Purulia and Bankura in West Bengal. It is believed that *Bosumati* (Mother Earth), *Chungulang* (personified as the God of Heaven) and *Parameswari* (the celestial Nature) have combined to produce the earth. They pay homage to this Progenitive Trinity. It can be said that rites and rituals are not always cantered on the creator and the deities. Sometimes, it is believed that wicked spirits, trees, and animals are the objects

of worship. As Abdur Sattar says in his book, *The Tribal Culture of Bangladesh,* "Tribal pujas are basically worship of nature and its various attributes represented by the numerous gods and demons"(Sattar 49).

Radha Krishna myth and Literary reception to Jhumur performance

K.Ayyappa Paniker in his edited book *Making Indian Literature* says "to know a language we depend on knowing words, which are a vehicle to convey to others what is stored in one's mind"(Paniker 141). Rural culture also depends on the geographical features of a specific area, and rituals are the main factors that enrich folk culture. Jhumur is a type of 'fertility song' of the tribal people of the Chotanagpur Plateau, which is accompanied by dancing. The word "Jhumur" originated from the word "*jhum*" that means shifting cultivation. *jhum* is a primitive method of cultivation often practiced by the tribes of hilly areas in eastern India, the Chotanagpur Plateau (Ranajit Deb 263). In the *Karam* festival, Jhumur songs are also present, but they are not romantic in nature. Although nowadays, most of the topics of these songs are centered around the love story of Radha and Krishna, we know that all rural songs and folklore change over time and face some kind of distortion. When Vaishnavism became dominant in the areas of Rarh Bengal, some aspects of 'Vaishnavite culture' became part of it, although its origins are traced to the phenomenon of cultivation among the tribes (Sudhir Chakravarti 344-45). The origin of the songs was noted in the hilly region of the Chotonagpur Plateau and mainly in the Purulia district of West Bengal.

Sudhir Karan in his book *Simanta Banglar Lokojan* he addresses out of fear man started to worship nature and the concept of fear Goddess came into being in society. Similarly Nandadulal Acharya argues in his book *Rather Lokosaniskriti* that Chandi was worshipped as village deity by people (Acharya 15). Side by side to fertilize the land people of munda community worshipped the land god and offered or sacrificed the head of the domestic animals. To bring and control rain hill tribes or munda community worshipped *Thayer Buri* or *Bata Bongs*. They also worshipped *Maradako Turoko* goddess.

Jhumur songs are primarily performed at festivals like *Karam*, *Tusu*, and *Bandna*. These songs were part of the daily life of various communities such as the Kurmi, Oraon, and Munda. Although several Jhumur artists, like Binoy Mahato *Lokayat Jharkhand,* point out in his book that the main theme of the Jhumur songs is the love story of Radha, Krishna, and Rama, Laxmana. Manik Lal Sinha clearly points out that these songs originated when the primitive Proto-Australoid people of the Chotanagpur Plateau started terrace cultivation in the Neolithic period. Thus, we can find that over time, the culture of these tribes had to accept the religious dominance of the people of the plains, or it might also be that cultural exchanges were taking place (Ranajit Deb 257). However, we can find here *Sadri* language. Whatever the actual process might be, it is clear that the distortion of Jhumur songs occurred over time. Music is a living tradition, and in folk society, it is an integral part of daily life and their working patterns (Milankanti Biswas 30).

Geographical location and cultural exchange

The tribes of Darjeeling are not the natives of its soil; they are all immigrants. They migrated from Bihar and Chotanagpur Plateau at different periods. These tribes settled in areas namely Kalimpong, Darjeeling, and Assam, and originally belonged to *Rarh Bangala* (Ranajit Deb 182). How far they have influenced the people of Darjeeling and so-called North Bengal with their civilization, culture, performance, language, and blood is significant. Truly, it needs elaborate discussion. In any case, the tribal denizens who have come from Purulia and Bankura, recluse to the people of the Northeast, have distinct cultural entities that are noted as much for individuality as for variety. Therefore, cultural and literary exchange has been possible here.

Before we go through the analysis we come across the concept that what is culture? As states Abdus Sattar states in his book *Tribal Culture in Bangladesh* (1955), "Culture denotes a sum total of mores and conventions developed by a group of people or a nation" (Sattar 3). He also says that "The culture of a people is a complete blend that includes strands of religion and forms of worship, conventions and rituals, food and drink, art and

craft, music and dancing, sex and marriage, crematory rites-and everything else" (Sattar 3). It is an admitted fact that an inquiry into the culture of a people ought to examine it in the light of the present as much as the past. A certain pattern and affinity are discernible in the way of life of the different races of people throughout the course of evolution. Religious beliefs and superstitions are the common strands in these cultures. The significant cultural configuration is now intact. Here, the outlines are still hard and sharply drawn against the contrasting background of civilization with no sign of dimming. The performers' religious beliefs and practices completely insulate them against the demands of Modernism. This is the reason behind their solicitation of expression in the performance. Implicitly, they believe in the life essence of the performance of seasonal songs.

Literary transactions and exchange with other rural art form

Jhumur was influenced by other forms of rural songs, particularly by Kirtan, which was most popular among the common masses in the late nineteenth century. Not merely from *Kirtan*, it also took elements from *Khemta* (one type of rural song) and *Nachni dance* (one kind of rural song that flourished in the Purulia district). It ridicules the hypocrisy of the upper class and the social order. It neither compromises with the established order of society nor resists oppression. With the British invasion in India, it, like other traditional rural forms (*Kesto Jatra, Jatra, Alkaap, Kabi gaan, Sang*, etc.), suffered severely (Sumanta Bandyopadhyay 278). The main subject of this song is devotion to God. More than what we call Jhumur, this song highlights the history of special nations. With the effortless travel of the elements, the history of life and struggle comes through the song. This history is, in some ways, the history of suppression, pain, and survival. Survival, which is not wrong, is an integral part of our literary history. Therefore, it is possible to easily refute the views in studies that claim Jhumur is shown only as a primitive song or that these songs lack depth. This is why Jhumur songs, apart from love, can be seen to be associated with other subjects. Needless to say, this characteristic indicates the flowing current of dynamic rural culture.

Jhumur performance as part of literary history

According to G. G. Joshi, director of CCRT, art is essentially an expression of human creativity- a medium to communicate emotions and feelings. It takes the form of paintings, sculpture, music, dance, literature, etc. These mark the fundamental identity of the tribe and clan. Such auspicious occasions are earmarked by tribal and rural paintings. Tribal and rural paintings are not naturalistic but pictorial, graphic representations (pictorial signs or symbols) of rituals, ceremonies, and daily activities. It is considered that the living traditions of our country are our cultural heritage. It is interesting to note that it continuously evolves, adapts, and rejuvenates. Jhumur is, to a certain extent, a collective expression of rural Indian people driven by a desire to fulfil their social and emotional needs. This Jhumur tradition has played a significant role in propagating seasonal activities into songs. The specificity of the region has shaped the distinct rural culture. In the soil of this cultural heritage, artistic performance has been produced.00 We can find its exchange and transition. What is more significant is that this cultural exchange can lead us to think about the socio-political history and literary history, the origin of their community, and their struggles.

If we glance at the folklore studies in them, it will be noticed that folklore studies first emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly through colonial officials. It was the colonial administration that carved out space for the articulation of folklore studies and archived Indian culture. Although the purpose of archiving folk culture had different intentions for the colonialists and the Indian researchers, the colonial government had political motives, while the latter sought to explore the cultural diaspora of the subaltern classes (Sumanta Bandyopadhyay 78). The history of folk songs depends on the racial and ethnic research of people from different aboriginal groups in India. The customs, rituals, festivals, dances, and music of these tribes are still alive among us. Many of the lyrics and tunes of these aborigines have merged with the lyrics and tunes of conventional folk songs of Bengal, especially in Rarh Bangla.

It is the *Nachni Jhumur* that has taken the space of performance. It has a relationship with the baiji tradition of Bengal. We must remember the story of Lal Bai from the Bankura district. Her contributions to literature and other arts are remarkable. Ramapada Chowdhuri, in his novel *Lalbai*, has elaborately depicted the socio-cultural history of that time. His argument is whether the connection or contact zone of literary exchange happened or not. As students of literature, we should remember that these contact zones are very significant for tracing the trajectory of literature, arts, dance, and performance. All these come under the concept of writing literary history and how these artists and their performances are valuable in the field of literature. It is important to depict this because these so-called peripheral artists have contributed to this performance tradition and are still associated with the form.

So, the baiji dance tradition obviously influences the contemporary Jhumur performance tradition of Purulia. According to Jhumur performer Salabat Mahata, cultural exchange and literary transactions have been exchanged between these two art forms. In the novel *Abhinetri*, Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay clearly introduces the socio-cultural and political history of the time. During this period, the colliery belt was involved in the entertainment of Jatra performances and the baiji dance tradition. Wine parties were very common, and baijis were hired from nearby areas (Bandyopadhyay 57).

Conclusion

Jhumur performance comprises intrinsic patterns of rural Indian thought and cultural attitudes. The prevalent notion is that it is a journey of form and community. The subject matter of the songs reinforces the need to think from the perspective of socio-cultural issues. The literary reception and the scope of the Jhumur performance are not limited. This analysis opens up multiple possibilities. In a particular period of time, many genres have come into contact with other forms of literary tradition. By accepting literary elements from other genres, this performance tradition enriches itself and plays a very significant role in the history of literature. In the end, it can be said that the Jhumur performance tradition is not merely a form of entertainment for the community; rather, it retains the history, political ambiance, and social and economic picture of the Santhal community. Truly, it is a form of protest and a history of the struggle of the Chotanagpur Plateau people. In reality, this performing art is essentially a collective phenomenon.

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